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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000563

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR B. NEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE'S FLAWED ELECTION - WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

REF: (A) HARARE 508 (B) HARARE 502 (C) HARARE 501

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Inexplicably high voting totals, high voter turn-away rates, and manipulation of voter registration rolls appear to have been used in combination by the ruling ZANU-PF party in a large number of constituencies to ensure its victory in Zimbabwe's March 31 parliamentary elections. The discrepancies in vote totals released by the Zimbabwe Election Commission (ZEC) early Friday morning and the final results remain unexplained. ZEC has suggested that the announced totals were preliminary but has yet to provide hard data, such as tallies for polling stations, that could put suspicions of rigging to rest. Preliminary figures developed by the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) suggest an additional tactic -- that accredited observers were systematically excluded from certain polling stations that then returned results heavily skewed in ZANU-PF's favor and that were enough to swing highly contested constituencies. The MDC has, however, so far has failed to produce any semblance of a parallel vote count, undercutting its claims of fraud. END SUMMARY.

Discrepancies in Announced Vote Counts

2. (U) Public charges by the MDC and others of GOZ vote-rigging revolve in part around gross discrepancies between figures released by ZEC at about 2 a.m. April 1 for the total number of ballots cast in constituencies from six out of Zimbabwe's ten provinces and the subsequently released final results for all constituencies. As noted in ref B, the first red-flag went up when ZEC inexplicably failed to announce total ballots cast for the four remaining provinces in its 2 a.m. announcement. Then, when total vote tallies for the candidates were released later in the next two days, the totals differed drastically from those first released.

3. (U) Some discrepancies in a national election might be expected, but the pattern in this election, which heavily favors the ruling party, as well as the high percentages involved, suggests rigging. Of the 19 constituencies where the discrepancy exceeded 5,000, 18 were won by ZANU-PF. ZANU-PF won 15 of the 17 constituencies where the discrepancy alone exceeded the winning candidate's margin. All but two of the constituencies in which the discrepancy exceeded either 5,000 or the margin were regarded by the MDC before the election as seats that were safely theirs or closely contested. The fact that ZEC never released the total vote counts for the other four provinces and never explained why the announcement abruptly stopped has fueled additional suspicion.

Turn-Aways

4. (U) The high rate of voter turn-away in other key constituencies is another likely indicator of ruling party manipulation. The national turn-away rate was about 10 percent, alarmingly high compared with typical figures of 2-3 percent in other developing country nations. In all more than 100,000 voters appear to have been turned away. Moreover, as reported in ref B, the figures varied significantly by constituency, tending to be higher in more contested areas. Our embassy observers, for example, noted that turn-aways in the safe ZANU-PF constituency of Gokwe Central never exceeded ten at any polling station; in contested Gokwe South, some polling stations turned away more than 100.

5. (U) ZEC has yet to release a final tally of turn-aways at 49 constituencies, including the Gokwe constituencies. However, at the constituencies for which ZEC has released turn-away figures, turn-away totals exceeded the candidate's margin of victory in five constituencies, three of which were won by the ruling party. More telling is that the turn-away figures combined with the discrepancies in ZEC's announced tallies exceed the candidates' margin of victory in 24 constituencies) 20 of them won by ZANU-PF.

Vote Totals Indicate Imported Voters

16. (SBU) Voter turnout across the country generally was lower than in the 2000 parliamentary elections. The few constituencies that saw an increase in ballots cast were typically heavily contested rural seats, all taken by ZANU-PF. In each of the two urban Manicaland constituencies retained by the MDC, for example, vote totals declined since 2000 (despite reports of net urban inflow from drought-ridden rural areas). By contrast, vote counts increased in all three of the rural seats in the region that shifted to ZANU-PF control, highlighting the importance of "new voters" in the ruling party victory.

17. (SBU) By way of illustration, Chimanimani had 19,842 ballots cast in 2000 with a 3338 MDC margin of victory. In 2005, 26,848 ballots were cast (or 23,896 per ZEC's 2 a.m. announcement) in the constituency with a 4,786 margin in ZANU-PF's favor. Principally responsible for the anomalous increase and shift to the ruling party was the reported resettling of thousands of soldiers, police, war veterans, and ruling party supporters in the constituency over the past year, much of it associated with the violent seizure of MDC MP Roy Bennett's large farm there.

18. (SBU) Harare South presents an urban example. In 2000, the MDC won the seat by a margin of 7,700 votes with a total of 17,160 votes cast. This year, the total jumped to 22,261 (22,403 per ZEC's early announcement) and yielded the seat to the ruling party by a margin of just 829 votes. Largely responsible for the boost in totals and the shift in control was a gerrymandering that reportedly brought police barracks and recently resettled populations) all largely pro-ZANU-PF - into the constituency.

ZEC: The Dog That Didn't Bark

19. (SBU) At a press conference April 7, ZEC Chairperson Justice George Chiweshe asserted that the initially announced figures were preliminary and not authoritative (not something mentioned when the figures were originally released), but did not explain why they differed so significantly from final figures or why figures were not originally announced for four of Zimbabwe's ten provinces. He said the ZEC had remained silent on the issue for so long because it had not received any formal complaint until the MDC filed its complaint on April 6. ZEC has also continued to withhold the polling station-by-polling station results necessary to analyze the integrity of the polling station and constituency-wide tabulations and has given no indication it ever intends to release the data.

Preliminary ZESN Figures

110. (SBU) Preliminary data collected by ZESN is still being collated and analyzed. ZESN observers numbered more than 6,000 and covered most polling stations in the country. Nonetheless, they were barred from selected polling stations, which suggests that the ruling party may have had a number of polling stations to which it controlled access and therefore the results. Indeed, figures for polling stations ZESN observed sometimes yielded anomalous results suggestive of ruling party control of voters for that station, if not the results. For example, in Chipinge North, a seat ZANU-PF took from an MDC incumbent, most polling stations reportedly went for the MDC by fairly close margins, with ZANU-PF winning the few polling stations it took by margins as high as six to one.

111. (SBU) ZESN data for at least one constituency also tips possible rigging at the constituency tabulation level. Nine out of ten representative polling stations it reported results for in Mutasa South, another heavily contested rural constituency reclaimed by ZANU-PF, went for the MDC often by wide margins. Only one small polling station went for ZANU-PF, suggesting that the aggregate figure that gave a narrow election to the ZANU-PF candidate was fabricated at the constituency tabulating level.

Waiting for MDC Data

112. (C) The MDC has put out several press releases highlighting doubts raised by discrepancies in ZEC's conflicting reports but has yet to release its own polling data for any constituency. MDC contacts tell us they are getting close to releasing data. However, some have confided to us that the quality of MDC polling agents has been a considerable handicap and it remains unclear when the party

will be able to release comprehensive data for any constituency. Meanwhile every day that passes lessens the impact when and if MDC ever does release a parallel count.

Distorting Pre-Election Flaws

113. (SBU) The reported numbers suggest rigging at both the polling center and constituency center tabulations. However, myriad fundamental flaws in Zimbabwe's pre-election environment also contributed to the skewed results and may have played a direct role in ZANU-PF's ability to generate the numbers it needed to win contested seats. For example, the GOZ undertook vigorous voter registration drives targeting likely ruling party supporters in the months before voter registration closed, while much of the country remained a no-go area for opposition until after registration closed. The GOZ's flagrantly partisan disbursement of food and other largesse to perpetuate public dependence on the ruling party further bolstered "support" for ZANU-PF, especially in rural areas. Subtle and not-so-subtle intimidation and the influence of co-opted chiefs further explain the high turn-out for ZANU-PF in key polling stations. By contrast, a legacy of fear and apathy built on the experience of two previous elections may have suppressed opposition turn-out, notwithstanding the encouraging attendance at campaign rallies in the final weeks. Emigration has also decimated urban, educated, and professional population segments that figure largely in the MDC's base.

Comment

114. (C) None of this yet amounts to definitive "proof" of massive fraud, but the preponderance of evidence shows a clear pattern. ZEC's continuing refusal to release polling station data lends credence to those who assume the worst -- that the most suspicious numbers and discrepancies indicate electoral fraud on the part of the GOZ. However, until the MDC and ZESN tally up and release their own data to contradict ZEC's announced results it will be difficult to fully determine now how and how much the GOZ rigged this election. The inability to prove fraud in a court of law is one issued, but the failure of ZESN and MDC to make strong public cases demonstrating detectable patterns is hurting their ability to make the case in the only venue that really counts: the court of public opinion.

115. (C) If there is a silver lining in Zimbabwe's clouded election results, it is that international and domestic pressure have pushed the ruling party to more remote redoubts of cheating. This may make it easier to help the MDC and others prepare to counter the cheating in the next election, but that will require international, and most importantly, regional pressure on the GOZ and ZANU-PF to shine more light on the deliberately opaque vote-counting process.

Dell